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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000489

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS UPDATE: KABILA, BEMBA REGISTER,
REGISTRATION DEADLINE EXTENDED

REF: A. 05 KINSHASA 1192

¶B. KINSHASA 459

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (U) Summary: Incumbent President Joseph Kabila officially registered March 23 as an independent candidate in the DRC's upcoming democratic elections. Vice Presidents Jean-Pierre Bemba (MLC) and Z'ahidi Ngoma (political opposition) had already registered on March 21 and 22, respectively. Vice President Ruberwa (RCD) has not yet registered and might decide not to take part in elections. Although registration for presidential and national assembly candidates was to have ended March 23, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) extended the registration period to April 2, since as of the morning of April 23 only 135 applications for the 500-seat national assembly had been fully processed and accepted by the CEI. End Summary.

Shifting Political Scenario

¶2. (C) Predictably, Congo's political scene is transforming as the elections process gets officially underway. Many changes began even before the official opening of Congo's campaign season. National Assembly President Olivier Kamitatu's expulsion from the MLC (ref a) resulted in a very public rupture within Jean-Pierre Bemba's group, and that schism was further deepened by the more recent voluntary departure of another high-profile figure, former Minister of Plan Alexis Thambwe (ref b). Minister of Secondary Education Paul Musafiri also has quietly left the MLC in favor of an emerging Kivu-axis coalition anchored by Minister of Regional Cooperation Mbusa Nyamwisi, who on March 21 registered his candidacy for the presidency and on March 23 announced his official coalition with Bandundu-based Kamitatu and his party. Many MLC members are quietly following Thambwe as independents, while others appear on the list of about 300 candidates for the joint Nyamwisi-Kamtatu campaign. Other former MLC members, such as Jose Endundu (former Minister of Transport) are being courted by both the PPRD and Pierre Pay Pay, another Kivutian (of the same Nande tribe as Nyamwisi) who is also a registered presidential candidate. Effectively, Bemba is left with the rump of the former MLC, with Thomas Luhaka, a young politician whom Bemba has nominated to replace Kamitatu as President of the National Assembly and Francois Mwamba, Minister of Finance, as its most high-profile member.

¶3. (C) Azarias Ruberwa's RCD is also under considerable stress, and could fracture in coming days. Ruberwa has staked

out an almost impossible position, demanding territorial status before the elections for Minembwe, the area in the High Plateau of South Kivu province with the highest national concentration of Banyamulenge (Ruberwa's tribal group).

Ruberwa made the mistake of publicly announcing that if his attempt to have a new electoral district for his people was not met he would not take part in elections. Meeting

Ruberwa's demand is essentially impossible for President Kabila, as he would effectively commit political suicide with the majority of the population in the province by acceding to Ruberwa's request at this point. Extremists in Ruberwa's party, and Ruberwa's own public declarations, have left him very little way out. The RCD Founders have been convened in periodic sessions for the last two weeks, and some influential members of this group have challenged Ruberwa's authority to take the party out of the electoral process.

Ruberwa has so far avoided a showdown while he and his supporters have worked hard to muster a majority base within the Founders. As far as we can tell, however, the majority of RCD members want to take part in elections -- as RCD, not independents. Ruberwa risks being removed from the helm of his party if he doesn't moderate his position -- but he risks being repudiated completely by his "base" if he backs down. If no face-saving solution is found to the Minembwe problem, soon the crisis will come for Ruberwa and the RCD, since the party must distribute its lists of electoral candidates by early next week to ensure they will be able to register during the extended period (i.e., before April 2).

¶4. (C) Joseph Kabila's decision to run as an independent candidate "the candidate for all the Congolese people," came as a surprise to most rank-and-file members of the PPRD, the party commonly regarded as Kabila's organ. His inner circle had known of the President's desire to be more

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representative, and Augustin Katumba, Kabila's Senior Advisor, had spent the last several months attempting to pull together a sort of "umbrella organization" anchored by the PPRD under whose rubric Kabila could have run. That plan came to naught, however, when it was published in a UDPS-affiliated newspaper, apparently after PPRD Secretary General Vital Kamerhe gave UDPS member Valentin Mbaki a copy of the draft document to convince him that UDPS members could take part -- and Mbaki gave the document to the press.

Provincial PPRD members to whom PolCouns has spoken seem generally not to yet know what, if any, effect Kabila's decision will have on their campaigns or the relative strength of the PPRD in the electoral process. Kinshasa-based Kabila advisors, including Katumba, of course insist that Kabila's decision won't hurt the party because despite being independent, he is still "affiliated" with the PPRD. That seems perhaps a bit facile. More likely there will be repercussions, particularly since not all PPRD members on the party's lists have registered yet, meaning they would have time to change their candidacy to independent -- or another party, decisions which again must be made before the registration deadline. We'll be watching as this plays out next week as well.

¶5. (C) Even the UDPS is not immune from the prevailing turbulence. Party President Etienne Tshisekedi's decision not to take part in elections -- to which he has so far remained steadfast despite pleas from many quarters that he run -- and his associated edict that none of his members will take part either, is shaking his group. The party's Secretary General, Remy Masamba, was on the brink of declaring his independent candidacy for the presidency, but at the last minute, expressing fear for the security of his family and also financial concerns, he backed away from the decision. Such a high-profile defection would certainly have split the party. However, Masamba told PolCouns that "many" UDPS members quietly registered March 22 and 23 for the national assembly contest (anticipating the announced end of the registration period), as had been discussed with Masamba as part of a plan to have a UDPS-independent block in the future Parliament.

Since Masamba has changed his mind, it's not yet clear how many UDPS members may have jumped ship, or who their future leader will be. And of course, the extended registration period will give Masamba a chance to reconsider and perhaps throw his hat in the ring, although that seems unlikely given the tenure of his conversation with PolCouns March 23. We will try to get a sense for how many UDPS members may have registered, and if others are likely to follow, since this clearly also has the potential to destabilize Tshisekedi's party and will be viewed by him as the actions of traitors challenging his authority.

CEI Extends Registration

¶ 16. (C) Almost anti-climactically, CEI President Abbe Malu Malu announced March 23 that registration for presidential and national assembly candidates would be extended from the anticipated deadline of March 23 to April 2. The controversial decision was necessary in large part because all the political parties had been slow in distributing their candidate lists -- and the associated necessary registration funds. As a result, as of the morning of March 23 the CEI had only 135 registered and accepted candidates for the 500-seat national assembly contest, clearly an unworkable scenario. Although flooded nationwide with last-minute applications March 23, there was no way to determine how many of those applications will actually be accepted, meaning verified by CEI agents as having correctly met all the registration prerequisites, thereby necessitating an extension.

Comment

¶ 17. (C) The CEI's decision has, naturally, been roundly decried on all sides. A radio talk show the morning of March 24, for instance, featured speakers demanding to know why there is sufficient time to extend registration for candidates when supposedly there was not enough time to reopen voter registration centers to accommodate UDPS members who had boycotted the registration period. (The answer is simple albeit unpalatable to UDPS supporters. Statistics clearly show that the majority of UDPS followers actually did register, despite Tshisekedi's injunction that they should

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not. As well, the verification and production of final voter lists is a separate exercise from that of candidate registration. Equally clearly, however, the numbers demonstrated yesterday that there were not enough registered candidates to hold elections.) Other participants accused the CEI of toadying to the RCD and giving that party more time to try to obtain its ends vis Minembwe (not true). There were few voices of reason outside of the CEI noting the simple mathematical necessity of the decision. Nonetheless, and thanks largely to the disorganization and political infighting in the parties, we now have a delay that we can ill-afford, in an already highly compressed electoral calendar which aims to deliver the vital objective of getting elections underway before June 30, since doing otherwise risks provoking significant social backlash.

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